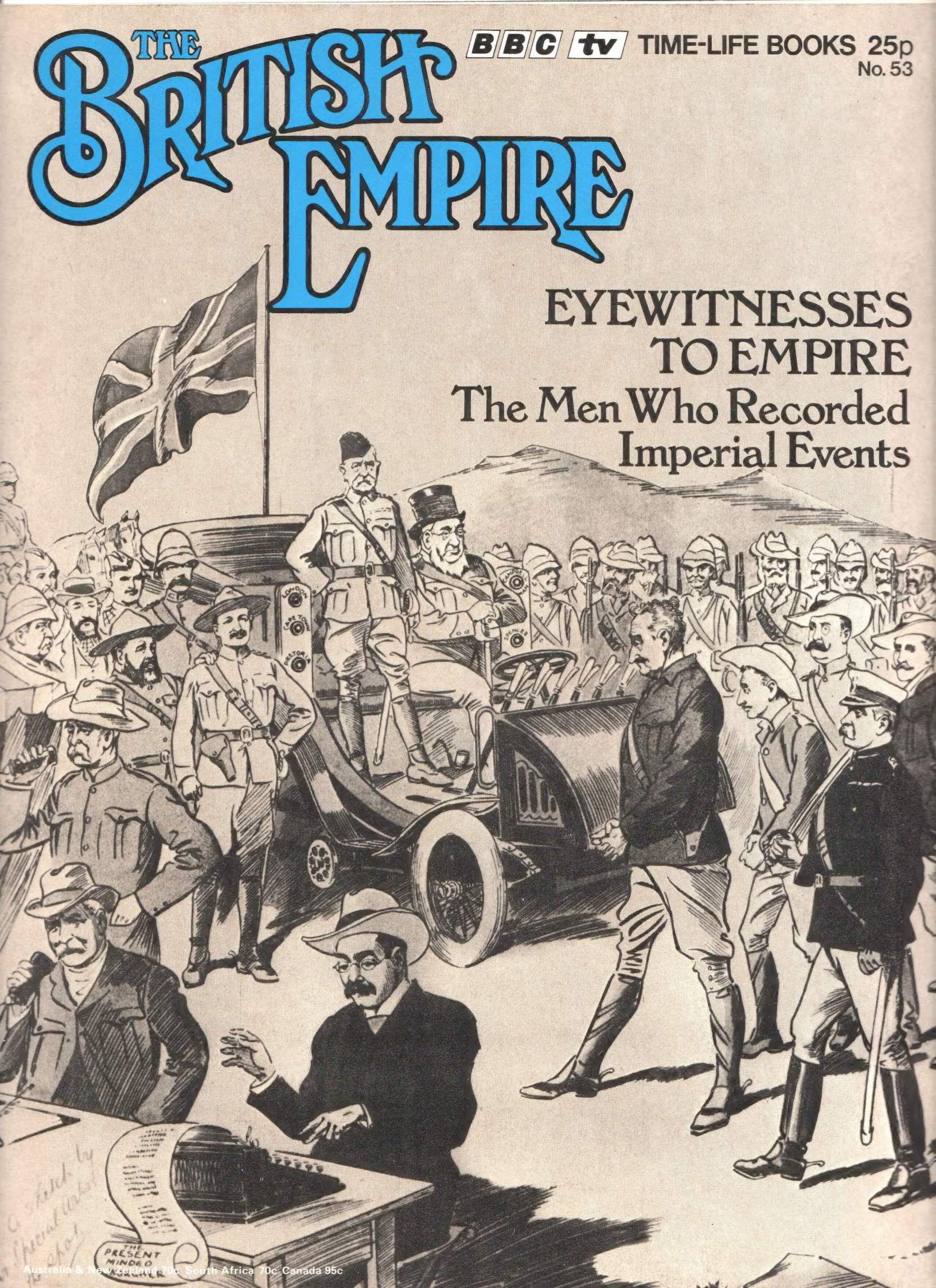
THE BRITISH EMPIRE

BBC tv TIME-LIFE BOOKS 25p
No. 53

EYEWITNESSES TO EMPIRE

The Men Who Recorded Imperial Events



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Cover: War correspondents, typing and telephoning in the foreground, hold a prominent position in this cartoon of leading figures in the Boer War

EYEWITNESSES TO EMPIRE

Bold, brash and larger than life, the war correspondents and artists of the late 19th Century were described by Kipling as possessing "the constitution of a bullock, the digestion of an ostrich and an infinite adaptability to all circumstances." Kitchener simply called them "drunken swabs." Whatever they were, these men gave the public the jingoistic slant they wanted on Britain's imperial wars

A group of Boer War correspondents pose nonchalantly for a photograph taken at the turn of the century.

by J.O.Springhall

"Current history falsified in coarse, flaring colours": this was how the liberal economist, John Hobson, characterized the picture of imperial events painted for the British public by late 19th-Century journalists. There was certainly a public demand for such reporting: the love of second-hand adventure and romance was an integral part of the imperial frenzy that gripped the British public towards the end of the century.

Moreover, the criticism could be applied, not only to the journalists, but to many of the travelling artists who provided sketches for the popular Press, to the engravers who modified these sketches for publication, to home-based painters whose massive canvases portrayed British heroism in action.

Of course, Hobson was exaggerating: the tradition of critical objectivity established by William Howard Russell during the Crimean War – a tradition that re-emerged strongly at the turn of the century, the end of the Golden Age of imperial war reporting – never wholly died. But there is truth enough in Hobson's criticism, and it is clearly visible in the writings of those who provided the public with most of its information about imperial goings-on: the war correspondents.

The young Rudyard Kipling wrote melodramatically of imperial war correspondents being "sent out when a war begins to minister to the blind, brutal, British public's bestial thirst for blood." Certainly in reporting the mass of "little wars" that pepper the history of British imperial expansion in the late 19th Century, the correspondents – the remarkably daring, tough "specials," as they were called – developed their own brand of adventure-story masquerading as news, with themselves often cast as heroes.

According to Kipling, a member of the New and Honourable Fraternity of War Correspondents had to have "the constitution of a bullock, the digestion of an ostrich and an infinite adaptability to all circumstances." In fact, correspondents were, for the most part, much more: hard-drinking, hard-living, tough and extremely professional. They had to be Jacks of all trades: writers, explorers, scouts, marksmen, cooks, linguists, amateur military tacticians and horsemen. With the advent of the telegraph and the correspondingly greater urgency to communicate news of a battle, the Reuters agent in Cairo believed his work was no longer journalism but simply good horsemanship.

In addition, to ensure the news was carried or transmitted efficiently, they had to be persuasive. Archibald Forbes, the "special" *par excellence*, once said that the ideal war correspondent should be big and ugly enough to command respect, but should also possess a sweet temper, affability and diplomacy – true, no doubt, but strange advice from one who was reputedly the worst-tempered man of his generation.

Thomas Baines was an intrepid artist, hunter and explorer – and born loser.

Above all they were dedicated to reporting the news, and if there was none they set about to create it for themselves. In the West African campaign of 1873 against the Ashanti, for example, when the commander, General Wolseley, was relatively inactive on the coast, H.M. Stanley, the famous explorer-journalist representing the *New York Herald*, suggested to George Alfred Henty, the author of boys' stories who was then the *Standard* correspondent, that they take his steam launch *Dauntless* up the River Prah to visit a "sideshow" expedition on the Rio Volta, in the hope of discovering some material for copy.

"No doubt it does seem a stupid sort of thing to do," Henty told his friends in camp, "if it had been an Englishman I would draw back; but if Stanley can do it, I can: and I am not going to let any Yankee say he was ready to do a thing, but an Englishman funked going with him." Henty's misplaced sense of national pride nearly cost him his life when Stanley's unstable vessel was caught by severe squalls and almost capsized during the dangerous journey upriver. Incidentally, on this campaign, Henty took with him several cases of spirits, a supply of claret and three dozen bottles of champagne, "which proved invaluable to brace us up to do our work."

There were similarities of style and attitude in the "specials'" writing as well as in their way of life. Indeed, they came very near to producing a stereotyped pattern of war reporting, imposing a particular vision of colonial warfare upon their newspaper readers. They gave popular currency to a whole set of attitudes towards natives, soldiers, generals and war itself. Reporters were sensitive only to data that seemed to confirm their European preconceptions: the journalistic image of Africa, for instance, was largely created in Europe to suit European needs. The poet Robert Graves once commented that between 1887 and 1914, "all professional soldiers belonged to one regiment, Kipling's own," and the war correspondent did much to create this

archetype of a stoical Tommy Atkins. Edgar Wallace, a great admirer and early imitator of Kipling, who represented the *Daily Mail* during the Boer War, was especially fond of using such a stereotype to classify the ordinary British soldier.

Another constant stock figure the war correspondent resorted to was the Faithful Native Servant – an indispensable literary foil. Time and again, war correspondents managed to provide themselves with comic menials whose cowardice in the face of battle could be guaranteed to offset their masters' bravery.

One journalist, Ernest Bennett, made great play with his cook, the faithful Ali, devoted to the protection of his journalist master: "As Ali the cook stood before us in his ill-fitting garments, with an enormous crusading sword in one hand and a kitchen collander and soup ladle in the other – a kind of walking allegory of Peace and War – we laughed so much we could scarcely catch our breath. . . . The faithful creature came up and informed me that he intended to devote his attention exclusively to the defence of my person during the coming fight. I gently restrained the vaulting ambition of my cook, and pointed out to him the value of less ostentatious heroism."

Counterposed to this was another familiar native stereotype, employed just as often: that of the Noble Savage or Brave Enemy – usually referring to warrior tribes like the Dervishes, Ashanti or Zulus who had won the respect of soldiers during combat. When encountered in battle, despite their decimation by highly efficient European arms, these warrior tribes showed unaccountable heedlessness of death, their "surprising" bravery thus rendering the British victory meritorious rather than brutally destructive.

George W. Steevens, of the *Daily Mail*, the doyen of war correspondents, wrote about the Sudanese: "To me the sight of that magnificent regiment was a revelation. One has got accustomed to associate a black skin with something either slavish or comical. From their faces these men might have been loafing darkies in South Carolina or minstrels in St. James's Hall. This was quite a new kind of black – every man a warrior from his youth up."

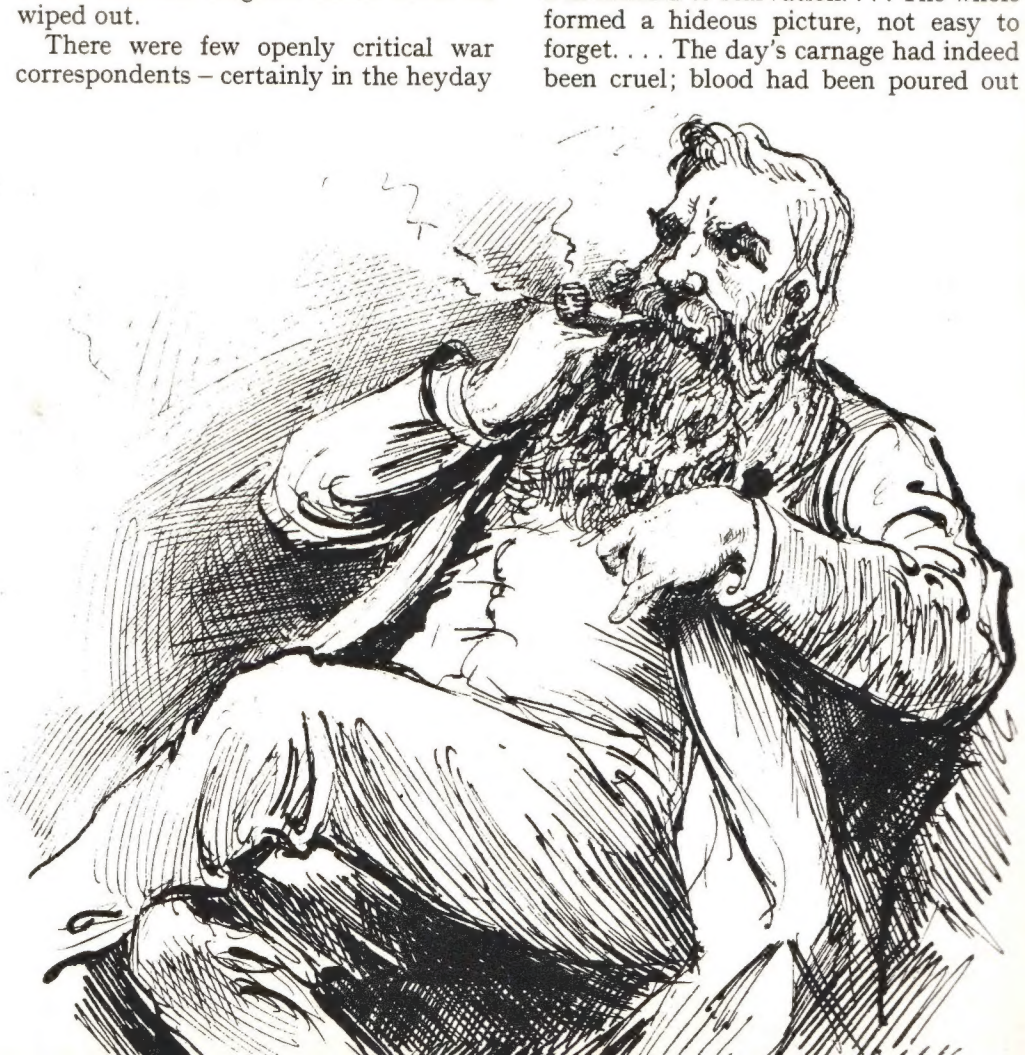
The racial superiority of the British, their divine right to rule, went unquestioned by the war correspondent. "It did one good," Archibald Forbes remarked after the defeat of the Zulus at the Battle of Ulundi in 1879, "to see the glorious old 'white arm' reassert once again its pristine prestige." George Steevens claimed that Kitchener's black troops "have seen many Englishmen die; they have never seen an Englishman show fear." And in his fiction for boys dealing with the Boer War, Henty employed a racial stereotype to depict the Boers as cowardly, corrupt, unwashed and brutal villains. *With Buller in Natal*, for example, contains a vivid description of Boer farmers "as unsavoury in appearance as they were brutal in manner. . . . The Boer sleeps in his clothes, gives himself a shake when he gets up, and his toilet is completed. . . . Four times in the year, however, the Boers indulge in a general wash."

Understandably, when disaster struck, the effect was correspondingly more shattering. When Henty heard the news of the British defeat by the Boers at Majuba Hill in 1881, he burst into tears and blubbered that the disgrace could never be wiped out.

There were few openly critical war correspondents – certainly in the heyday of jingo reporting between about 1860 and 1900 – for reporting was largely done from the reporter's own side and he was thus not only with his own countrymen but dependent on them to get the news out. Usually dispatches from the front were free from political or critical discussion, apart from the occasional complaint about the inadequacies of food or military transport.

It was not until the late 1890s, when Ernest Bennett went out to follow Kitchener in the Sudan and John Hobson to report the Boer War, that controversies were carried to the borders of Empire – as they had been in the pre-jingoistic 1850s. Instead of romance, adventure and picturesqueness, the new generation of war correspondents could see only the wanton, pointless destruction of Boer farmers and primitive tribesmen by means of superior fire- or manpower.

Ernest Bennett was clearly moved by the effect the British victory at the Battle of Omduran would have on the Sudanese, and wrote with passion and irony: "The terrific carnage of the day's fighting had taken away the breadwinner and protector from thousands of poor homes in the Sudan, and doomed many a household to starvation. . . . The whole formed a hideous picture, not easy to forget. . . . The day's carnage had indeed been cruel; blood had been poured out



G.A.Henty, barrel-chested author of countless adventure stories, acquired his material as a "special correspondent."

like water. . . . Mahdism has vanished, never to return, and once more the arms of Great Britain have advanced the cause of civilization and 'made for righteousness' in the history of the century."

To the ageing reporters from the Golden Age of war corresponding, Bennett and his fellows were cheap notoriety hunters, their strictures on imperialism serving merely "to beggar commonsense and yap intolerable humbug." One of Bennett's colleagues, Bennet Burleigh, replied scathingly that "cheap maudlin sentiment may profess a pity for those 'dervish homes ruined' by the successes of British arms [but] one of the 'fads' of the day is to hold that liberalism of mind is always characterized by being a friend to every country and race but your own."

By the end of the 19th Century, with the Boer War forming an appropriate watershed, the incurable romanticism of the old-style war correspondent had become the subject of jokes; the day of the men who had served the imperial frenzy at home from the battle-fields of the British Empire was over.

In the course of its chequered history, the profession of war correspondent has thrown up many eccentric, courageous and even outstanding personalities. The two most famous of the 19th-Century British war correspondents, although completely different in both style and method, were William Howard Russell, a popular Anglo-Irish raconteur and *bon vivant*, and Archibald Forbes, an egocentric rough-tongued Scotsman. Together, their lives and careers in journalism tell us a great deal about the sort of men who became war correspondents, as well as spanning the Empire's Golden Age of war reporting.

Sir William Russell, familiarly known as "Billy" or "Balaclava" Russell, never relished the title of war correspondent and preferred to see himself simply as a reporter for whom fate had chosen the battle-field as the arena in which to exercise his profession. When he was awarded, by common consent, the honorary title of "Father of War Correspondents," he joked about the intended compliment and referred to himself as "the miserable parent of a luckless tribe." Strictly speaking, Russell was not the first war correspondent, but he was certainly the first of the great professional war correspondents of the 19th Century.

Russell was born on March 28, 1820, at Lily Vale in the parish of Tallaght, a rural district of County Dublin. Russell's father had a business, but it collapsed and, like many Irishmen of his generation, he emigrated to Liverpool leaving his son behind. Young William was brought up first by one grandfather in his mother's faith as a Catholic, but was then converted to the Protestant religion, his father's faith, by his boisterous, fox-hunting, paternal grandfather, a Dubliner. He went to Trinity College, Dublin, from 1838 to 1841. He left without a degree but with an affection for the classics that persisted in later life.

In 1843, after spending some time teaching and reading for the Bar, Russell joined *The Times* on a part-time basis and was sent by J. T. Delane, its famous editor, to report on Irish affairs. Eventually, after giving up a possible career as a barrister, Russell became a full-time reporter for *The Times* and received his baptism of fire during the 1850 Danish-Prussian War over Schleswig-Holstein. Then, in 1854, came his year of destiny when Delane sent him to Malta to be on hand in case of an outbreak of war between Russia and France in the Crimea. When war was declared, Russell reported on the Charge of the Light Brigade and the Thin Red Line of British infantry at Balaclava.

His dispatches remain masterpieces of journalism, but the real significance of his letters from the front lay less in his descriptions of battles than in his accounts of camp and hospital conditions and in the impact of these disclosures on public opinion at home. It has even been suggested that his reporting, revealing the British government's mismanagement of the war, and the gross inefficiency of the War Office in particular, brought about the resignation of Lord Aberdeen's cabinet. "It was you who turned out the government, Mr. Russell," the displaced Secretary for War, the Duke of Newcastle, is supposed to have told him as they rode together in the Crimea.

Certainly, only Russell could have won over so many army informants in the Crimea, sharing as he did with many senior officers a similar Irish background that made them susceptible to his blarney. Russell owed much of his popularity to his Irish humour. He was always good company and his ceaseless flow of stories, retailed in the dulcet tones of a rich Irish brogue, were greatly relished by both William Makepeace Thackeray and Prince Albert Edward, the future Edward VII. So impressed was the Prince that he later made Russell one of his staff companions on his tour of India in 1875.

After the Crimean War was over, Delane decided to send Russell off to report on the Indian Mutiny, where he managed to be present at the retaking of Lucknow in 1858 by Sir Colin Campbell. Thereafter, he reported in succession on the American Civil War, the Austro-Prussian War in 1866 and the Franco-Prussian War in 1870.

In 1879 Russell was sent out to Africa to report on the Zulu War for the *Daily Telegraph*, but by the time he arrived on the scene it was almost over. Out of this war came a protracted controversy with Sir Garnet Wolseley over charges of misbehaviour that Russell had brought against some of the British troops. In

The great Irish reporter William Howard Russell was one of the few war correspondents to attempt an unbiased view of events.

1880 *Punch* published a cartoon showing "an assault of arms between General Sword and Captain Pen." Finally, holidaying in Egypt in 1882, the veteran war correspondent found himself once again in the presence of war, yet without any professional part in it, when the nationalist uprising of Arabi Pasha was put down by the British at Tel-el-Kebir.

Russell may be said to have invented the office of the modern war correspondent. He approached war reporting in magisterial fashion, dispensing praise and blame to friend and foe alike, without regard to official promptings and directives. This led to his being charged by the military in the Crimea with undermining public confidence in the army, with fomenting discontent and with revealing military information of value to the enemy. "I ask you to consider," Lord Raglan, British Commander-in-Chief in the Crimea, demanded of the Secretary for War in 1855, "whether the paid agent of the Emperor of Russia could better serve his master than does the correspondent of the paper that has the largest circulation in Europe."

Russell's journalism displayed a growing irreverence towards military authority. His fundamental liberalism emerges clearly from his letters written during the Indian Mutiny. Delane even attributed the cessation of the indiscriminate execution of sepoys and a great deal of the credit for the controversial post-Mutiny policies of the Governor-General, "Clemency" Canning, to the influence of Russell's dispatches and private letters. The two-volume diary that Russell kept in India, published in 1860, gives a self-portrait of a man of moderation, honesty and intelligence, now and then given to verbosity and flowery statements in the artificial style of the time, but with the observant eye of a great journalist.

Remarkably dispassionate for a British war correspondent in the inflamed India of 1858, Russell pointed out that the retributive savagery exacted by the British for the Cawnpore massacre was so ferocious because the deed was done by a subject race, "by black men who dared to shed the blood of their masters." Russell's analysis of the underlying causes of the Mutiny was also more profound

Russell as "Captain Pen" (left) battles with "General Sword" (Garnet Wolseley) – a *Punch* comment on the quarrel resulting when Russell damned Wolseley's Zulu War leadership.

than that of those Anglo-Indians who reacted emotionally and violently to it as a threat to the stability of the British Empire. "Here we had not only a servile war and a sort of *jacquerie* [peasant rising] combined," he records in his diary for February 12, 1858, "but we had a war of religion, a war of race, and a war of revenge, of hope, of some national promptings to shake off the yoke of a stranger, and to re-establish the full power of native chiefs, and the full sway of native religions." He believed that the British could not govern India justly until they first learned to repress their own racialist attitudes by governing themselves.

Russell's vision of warfare was less romantic than that of his fellow war correspondents. He reported the British atrocities, committed in the name of an Evangelical crusade, with a rare conscience and humanity. During the retaking of Lucknow by Sir Colin Campbell and General Outram, Russell had a grandstand view of the savage street fighting, plundering, mutilations and torture. In one particularly horrifying scene, he recorded the roasting alive by Sikhs of a sepoy captive, while Englishmen looked on. "War can never be purged of a dross of cruelty and barbarism," he sagely concluded. "Conduct warfare on the most chivalrous principles, there must ever be a touch of murder about it, and the assassin will lurk under fine phrases."

Again, during a dreary part of the siege of Lucknow, he complained that "dull scientific method has taken the place of ardour and vigorous enterprise" – an interesting contrast to the romantic

heroism of most 19th Century reporting.

Russell may have been critical, but he was, deep down, a sincere patriot, who could on occasion be stirred by the trappings of British power, as the following ecstatic description exemplifies: "The bright scarlet of the Bays shines brightly in the sun. What a storm of lightning points – flashes of bright steel – bursts through the cloud of dust. There go the artillery – thirty guns. There go the Rifles – the dear old brigade. Will the column never cease?" And there was never any doubt in his mind that British rule in India was for the best if properly exercised. On leaving India, Russell concluded in his diary, in his typically judicial fashion: "Let us be just, and fear not – popularize our rule – reform our laws – adapt our saddle to the back which bears it. Let us govern India by superior intelligence, honesty, virtue, morality, not by the mere force of heavier metal."

Russell was, in the truest sense of the word, a reporter. As he once succinctly put it, his job was a simple one: "I stand and look around, and say, 'thus does it appear to me, and thus I seem to see'." – as apt a comment on his life and works as the epitaph on the memorial to him in the crypt of St. Paul's: "The First and Greatest of War Correspondents."

By the 1870s, the reporting techniques popular at the time of the Crimean War seemed outdated; the knack of concise condensation in the war telegram had become more important than the power to write long, descriptive, graphic war reports. A new era, that of the electric telegraph, began in which the leisurely pen of a Russell was overtaken by hasty descriptions and a mad race to get the news home first.

The man who, more than any other, ushered in this new era was the bull-like Archibald Forbes, after Russell probably the most famous British war correspondent of the 19th Century. During the Franco-Prussian War, Forbes's adept use of the telegraph enabled him to establish a supremacy, at least in speed, over Russell. Kipling referred to Forbes as "the chiefest, as he was the hugest, of the war correspondents, and his experience dated from the birth of the needle-gun.... There was no man mightier in the craft than he, and he always opened his conversation with the news that there would be trouble in the Balkans in the spring."

Born in 1838, Forbes was the son of a Presbyterian clergyman in Banffshire, north Scotland. He was educated at Aberdeen University from 1854 to 1857. Under the influence of a course of lectures given by William Russell in Edinburgh, which included a powerful description of the Charge of the Light Brigade, he enlisted in the Royal Dragoons as an ordinary trooper. On leaving the army in 1867 he started, and for four years ran, a weekly journal called the *London Scotsman*. Forbes's chance as a journalist came when, in 1870 during the Franco-Prussian War, he was dispatched to the siege of Metz by the *Morning Advertiser*. He soon transferred to the *Daily News*, with which newspaper his name became traditionally associated.

Forbes's adoption of brief telegraphic reports, rather than the sober, detailed dispatches of Russell, were to secure him several scoops during the Franco-Prussian War. He was first with the news of the surrender of the French Army and the bombardment of St. Denis, and the first to report conditions inside Paris when that city capitulated.

On entering Paris with the Prussians in 1871, he was nearly drowned in a fountain as a German spy by an enthusiastic French mob. And he narrowly escaped death at the hands of firing-squads on two occasions.

Throughout these adventures his success was prodigious, despite a ban by the French authorities on the use of the telegraph. He saw what most other war correspondents failed to see: that access to telegraph wires could be had in Belgium and Luxembourg, and he was always ingenious enough to devise ways of dispatching his messages from those places. At the same time he was unequalled at throwing other correspondents off his tail.

For Forbes, war reporting was a fine art. The art, it must be said, consisted neither in the mastery of military knowledge nor in the composition of battle descriptions; it lay rather, in the ability, in which he excelled, to get the news home first. Lord Salisbury, the eminent Victorian statesman, once described the war correspondent as "a man who combines the skill of a first class steeple chaser with the skill of a first class writer," but Forbes was pre-eminently the former. For him, the actual writing was only the beginning. A war correspondent achieved little if he had no means of getting his work on to his editor's desk before that of his rivals. The accomplishment of this goal by means of organization, careful arrangement, watchfulness and severe personal exertion – that, for Forbes, was "the real material and effective triumph" of the good war correspondent.

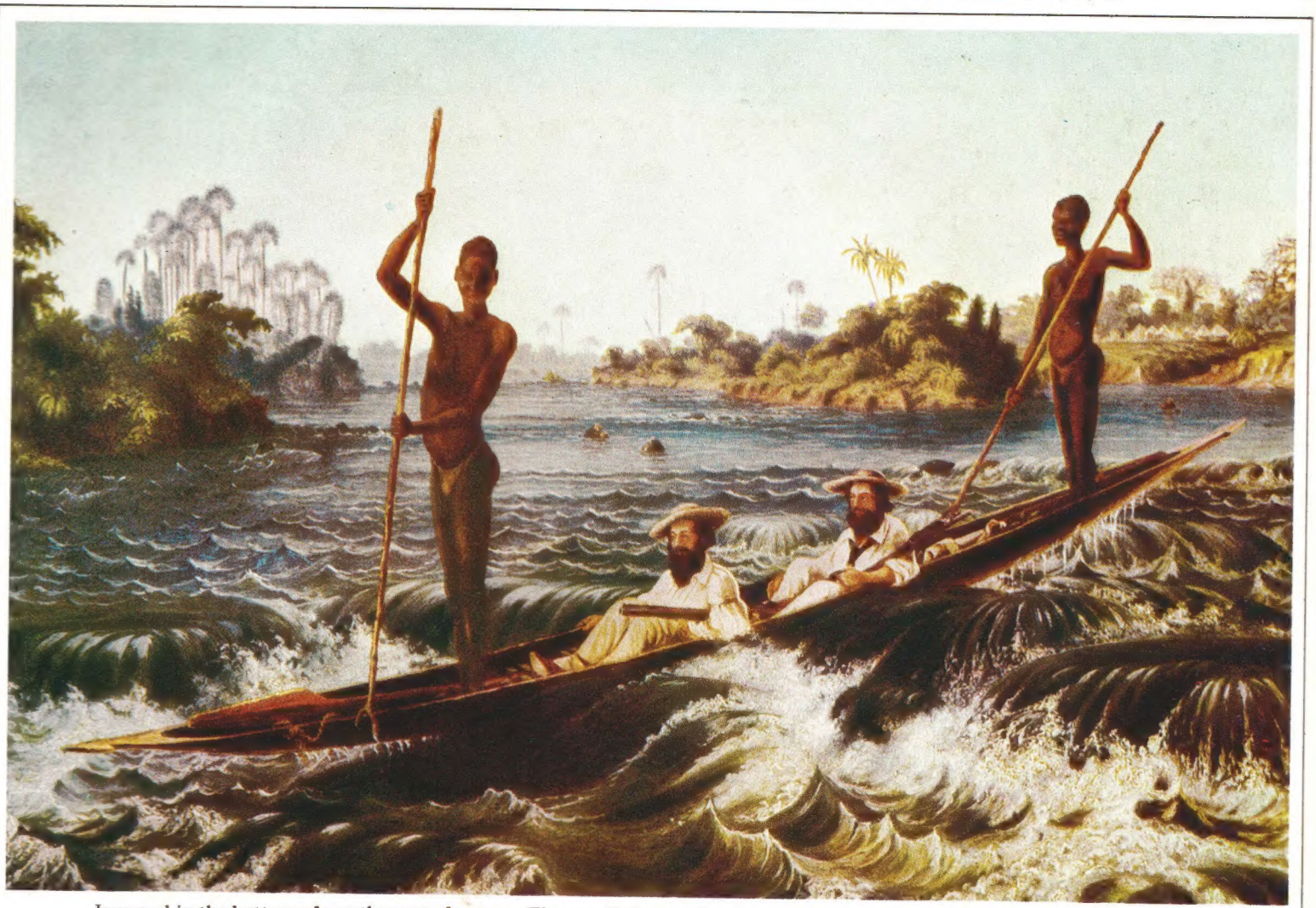
While Forbes developed the prompt forwarding of letters and telegrams into a real science, the information that he gathered was secured by riding, as he put it, "on the cannon-thunder." He was always to be found wherever "the mad excitement of the battle surges up into the brain like strong drink."

In the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78 Forbes was present for the *Daily News* at the epic siege of Plevna and, according to Frederick Villiers, the *Graphic*'s artist, sat on the hill of Radishova, writing a full description of the battle while under heavy shellfire, the only man Villiers actually saw writing while a battle was being fought all round him. "But what are you to do?" commented Villiers later, "You might as well work as stand still and do nothing."

At Plevna, Forbes had pre-arranged for a chain of post-horses to be ready for him and, on leaving the siege, by riding non-stop over the Carpathians, he covered 140 miles in 30 hours, so that the next day the *Daily News* could publish exclusively a two-column story on the failure of the Russian assault before the Russians had had time to report the news to their own countrymen.

Forbes was also present at the 1878–79 Afghan War, where he accompanied the Khyber Pass force to Jellalabad. In the 1879–80 Zulu War, along with Melton Prior, the *Illustrated London News*'s "special artist," he was among the first to reach the body of the Prince Imperial, son and heir of Napoleon III, speared to death by the Zulus. As Forbes put it in grandiloquent fashion, "to be slain by savages in an obscure corner of a remote continent was a miserable end, truly, for him who once was the Son of France!"

THOMAS BAINES, EXPLORER WITH AN EASEL



Jammed in the bottom of a rather unsafe canoe, Thomas Baines and a companion are navigated down the Zambesi in 1859.

Quiet, unassuming and unheroic, the artist Thomas Baines made his own special contribution to the historical record of the Empire. As he wandered slowly and impecuniously around Africa and Australia, he painted picture after picture illustrating his delight in the romance of exotic lands. Usually he travelled alone, supporting himself by his paintings and drawings, some of which have appeared elsewhere in this history. But, as the following pages show, he also joined two sponsored expeditions – with varying degrees of success.

Storekeeping Artist

Born into a sea-faring family in 1820, Baines left England in 1842 for South Africa, where he spent 11 years. The modest fame he achieved through his paintings gained him a place as artist-storekeeper on an expedition to explore northern Australia.

Working from a base 80 miles up the river the expedition, led by the experienced Charles Gregory, managed to map a large area of northern Australia, but it was dogged by problems. When the explorers returned to their leaky ships at the mouth of the River Victoria, they discovered that the Captain had allowed two years' stores to be ruined by sea-water. Gregory decided that Baines should sail to the Dutch island of Timor, 700 miles away, for new supplies. There, Baines discovered his ship was sinking. He chartered a lumbering vessel named the *Messenger*, left it to follow on with the bulk of the supplies, and sailed most of the way back to Australia in the *Messenger*'s open longboat.

He arrived safely and relieved Gregory, who later wrote Baines glowing testimonials that, after Baines's arrival home in 1856, helped gain him a place on one of Livingstone's African expeditions.

Baines chartered this brigantine, the *Messenger*, in Indonesia after the boat in which he was travelling started to sink. He loved boats and painted them at every opportunity.

Baines fights off an attack from some hostile Aborigines in dug-out canoes, after his 700-mile journey in the *Messenger*'s longboat across the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Baines – the leading horseman on the left – and another member of the party scatter some hostile Aborigines near the Baines River, a tributary of the Victoria. The Baines was named by the expedition's leader in honour of his diligent, unassuming artist.

Ruined by Livingstone

Baines became most famous – indeed notorious – as a result of his journey up the Zambesi under David Livingstone from 1858 until his dismissal in 1859. The expedition itself, for which Baines was the official artist, was not a success. Its main aim, to determine whether the Zambesi could become a commercial pathway into Africa's interior, was frustrated by the impassability of the river's rapids. The specially built steamboat, the *Ma Robert* (below), constructed in sections, was so infuriatingly inefficient that she was nicknamed the "Old Asthmatic." And Livingstone himself, however good he was with Africans, was impossibly intolerant of his white subordinates. At Tete, only about 200 miles upstream, Livingstone accused Baines of stealing some stores, dismissed him summarily and despatched him down-river. Though Baines continued to protest his innocence, the cloud of Livingstone's disapproval ended the artist's career as an officially sponsored explorer.

Baines's sketch shows the foremost section of the steam launch being unloaded.

Gold–and Disappointment

Baines spent his last years in South Africa, prospecting for gold in the pay of a London-based company. He was determined to develop his concession, which he had acquired from Lobengula of Matabeleland – the first the chief had granted to a white man.

But Baines was not to find his El Dorado. He could not pay for the heavy equipment he needed: indeed, it was all he could do to support himself and his companions by selling paintings, which continued to demonstrate the same gusto, the same, simple excitement as the earliest of his works. In the scene below, which shows his first visit to Matabeleland in 1867, the artist has included himself, standing in the centre, bidding farewell to his three companions.

He died, still hopeful, while setting up yet another gold-prospecting expedition into Matabeleland in 1875.

A native excitedly calls Baines away from a hunt to show him a gold-strike.

II. The Men Who Made Headlines

In the Zulu War, Forbes was also the first to send to Britain the news of the victory at Ulundi over the Zulu chief, Cetewayo, outpacing the official dispatch-rider after an epic 110-mile, 20-hour ride on horseback to reach the nearest telegraph post. He received no official thanks for this feat, and long resented the fact that the War Office did not award him the Ordinary Service Medal for the Zulu War, thus failing to contribute another item to his impressive collection of medals.

Two days after his ride he appeared in a state of utter exhaustion before Pietermaritzburg, having ridden an additional 170 miles in 35 hours to mail Melton Prior's sketches of the Zulus attacking the British square.

This famous ride, accomplished like many others with relays of horses, became a staple topic of conversation when war correspondents were gathered together. Forbes, often going for long periods without food or sleep, seemed to be the only reporter with the physical stamina to perform what seemed to his rivals miracles of endurance. As he frequently testified, the race was to the swift, and the battle to the strong in the new era of war correspondence.

Forbes was notoriously ill-tempered, pawky and tactless although, according to Russell, he was free from jealousy and bitterness. The stories about his egocentric, arrogant behaviour are legion. Claiming to be "the most decorated journalist who ever lived," Forbes's chest fairly glistened with rows of medals and foreign decorations. On occasions, he wore on his evening dinner dress, in double rows, 14 medals or crosses, including the Prussian Iron Cross, all awarded for his services as a war correspondent. No wonder that the cartoonist Harry Furniss could not resist caricaturing Russell as a bemedalled clown on the back of a menu during a public dinner. Forbes never spoke to him again. "As he was a very disagreeable man I was glad of it," Furniss later claimed.

Forbes's egocentricity may have been part and parcel of his job, since, as Russell once said, the frequent use of the first person pronoun was a mark of the war correspondent whose raw material was "the impressions made by passing events on the senses of the spectator." But Forbes took egocentricity to an extreme. Like many war correspondents who followed the frontier wars of Empire, Forbes wrote a good deal about his personal experiences, his thrilling adventures, his hairbreadth escapes, his physical discomforts, the seizure of his papers, the loss of his camera or sketch-book, his arrest as a spy; and often wrote of such events with little regard to the actual war he had been sent to cover. He became his own hero in the drama of warfare.

Having seen war all over the world, he had outgrown any diffidence he may once have had in passing judgement upon difficult military operations. After his criticism – much of it well merited – of Lord Chelmsford, who preceded Sir Garnet Wolseley, the target for Russell's criticisms, as commander during the Zulu War, one Sandhurst instructor published an indignant attack on Forbes: "One sees as if in a vision Mr. Forbes . . . with the eyes of the world upon him, crowning with one hand the grateful ghost of Wellington, while with the butt

The irascible Archibald Forbes (above), shown on his epic ride in 1880 from Ulundi carrying the sketches of special artist Melton Prior (left), became famous throughout Fleet Street for the endurance that enabled him to get his dispatches through before the official army messenger.

end of his trumpet he pushes Lord Chelmsford into the darkness of limbo."

His feats of endurance had given the *Daily News* many exclusive stories, but his great strength was worn out in the service of his newspaper. When he retired after ten years as a war correspondent, he earned a living writing inferior biographies of great men and his own voluminous reminiscences, retailing his personal adventures in works like *Barracks, Bivouacs and Battles* and *Camps, Quarters and Casual Places*.

His reputation, however, remained high. William Howard Russell wrote of Forbes when he died in 1900: "That incomparable Archibald, he has left no one to equal him."

The jingoistic love of romantic adventure and heroic action in which most correspondents indulged was also reflected in the work of the war artists who accompanied British military expeditions. The war artists gave an idealized form to the over-heated imaginations of newspaper readers, already stimulated by the written accounts of their countrymen in action. Or as one historian of the calling put it in 1914: "Graphic pictures of the life of the camp and incidents of the battle are the stuff that patriotism thrives on."

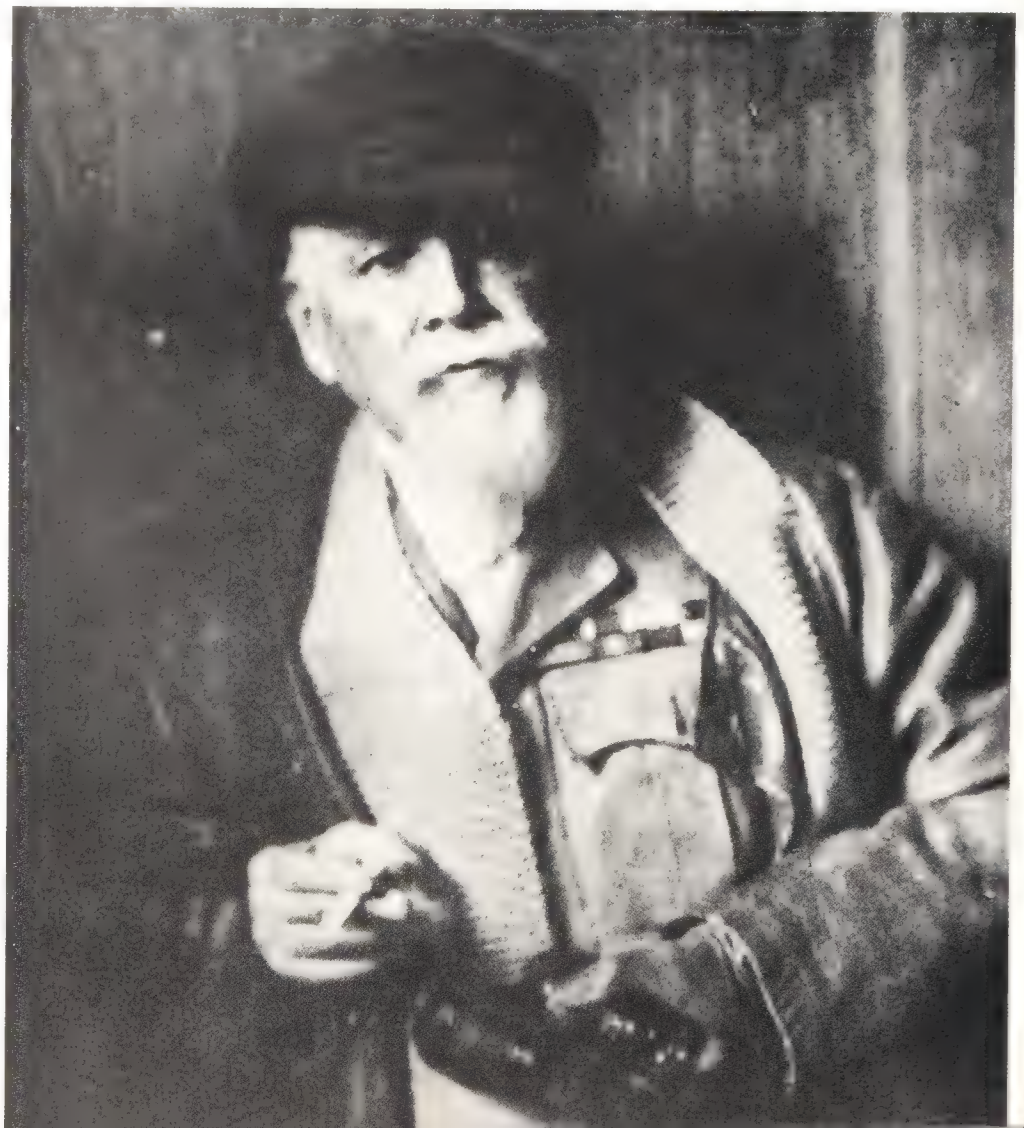
The artists, men like Frederick Villiers and Melton Prior, were consummate technicians and for the most part they drew accurately what they saw. But their choice of subject, dictated by the need to make dramatic impact, naturally favoured action and heroism. By concentrating on these twin themes, certain biases crept in. Character was sacrificed, carnage rare, looting by British seldom recorded. There must even have been cases where editors' requirements reinforced a bias that would otherwise have been largely unconscious. This is hinted at in Kipling's *The Light That Failed*, where the artist-hero, Dick Heldar, is asked by his editor to redraw a "brutal and coarse and violent" soldier as a "glossy hero," a request Dick refuses as it threatens his artistic integrity.

There was yet another "gloss" added to the artists' work, one over which they had no influence. Before their drawings, often rough and hasty, could be printed, they had to be revised, finished or even redrawn by the engravers. This was the result of a desire to make war more romantic and more palatable to the late Victorians. As one critic, Sir Frederick Maurice, put it, the public had to be content to take the dreams and fancies of London wood engravers – men who knew little of life outside of a four mile radius from Charing Cross – as substitutes for the realities of war.

The artists themselves of course knew this, accepted it as part of their job and could still pride themselves on their powers of visual reportage. Perhaps the best known among them was Melton Prior, of the *Illustrated London News*, a short, energetic, business-like man, whose shrill laugh and bald head won him the nickname of the "screeching billiard ball."

He was the reporter-artist *par excellence*, often actually taking part in the fighting. In the Ashanti War of 1873 he confessed to killing two warriors with H.M.Stanley's double-barrelled rifle: "I fired at one in the chest and knocked him over with swan shot and as the other turned I gave him the contents of the second barrel in the back." On another occasion, according to Prior, after Stanley had thrashed his native servants until one of them turned vindictive, the two of them had to take turns at sitting up in their tent all night, revolver in hand, to defend themselves from any attack.

At the Battle of Ulundi, during the 1879–80 Zulu War, Prior apparently lost his sketch-books during the fighting. On discovering his loss he fell to the ground and burst into tears until a passing general lent him his own notebook. Prior then ran about the British square as it repulsed charging Zulus, producing a whole batch of new sketches. The patriotic style of his paintings and sketches, although muted in comparison with the final product, may be gauged from statements like the following in his memoirs, which describes the British soldier in action: "Shall I ever forget it? I can even now see those brave Highlanders trying to force back a mass of savages. My God! What a ghastly sight it was!" and: "The men marched forward with teeth clenched, grasping their rifles, determined to do or die and uphold the glory, prestige and tradition of the British arms"



Frederick Villiers, special artist of the *Graphic* for nearly 50 years, claimed to have been in more wars than any man alive.

"SPECIAL ARTIST"

In 1844, the electric telegraph revolutionized news-gathering. For the first time, newspapers and magazines could print extensive up-to-date accounts of far-off events. Immediacy soon proved profitable, and to further enliven their products, editors – especially those on weekly magazines – began to print pictures.

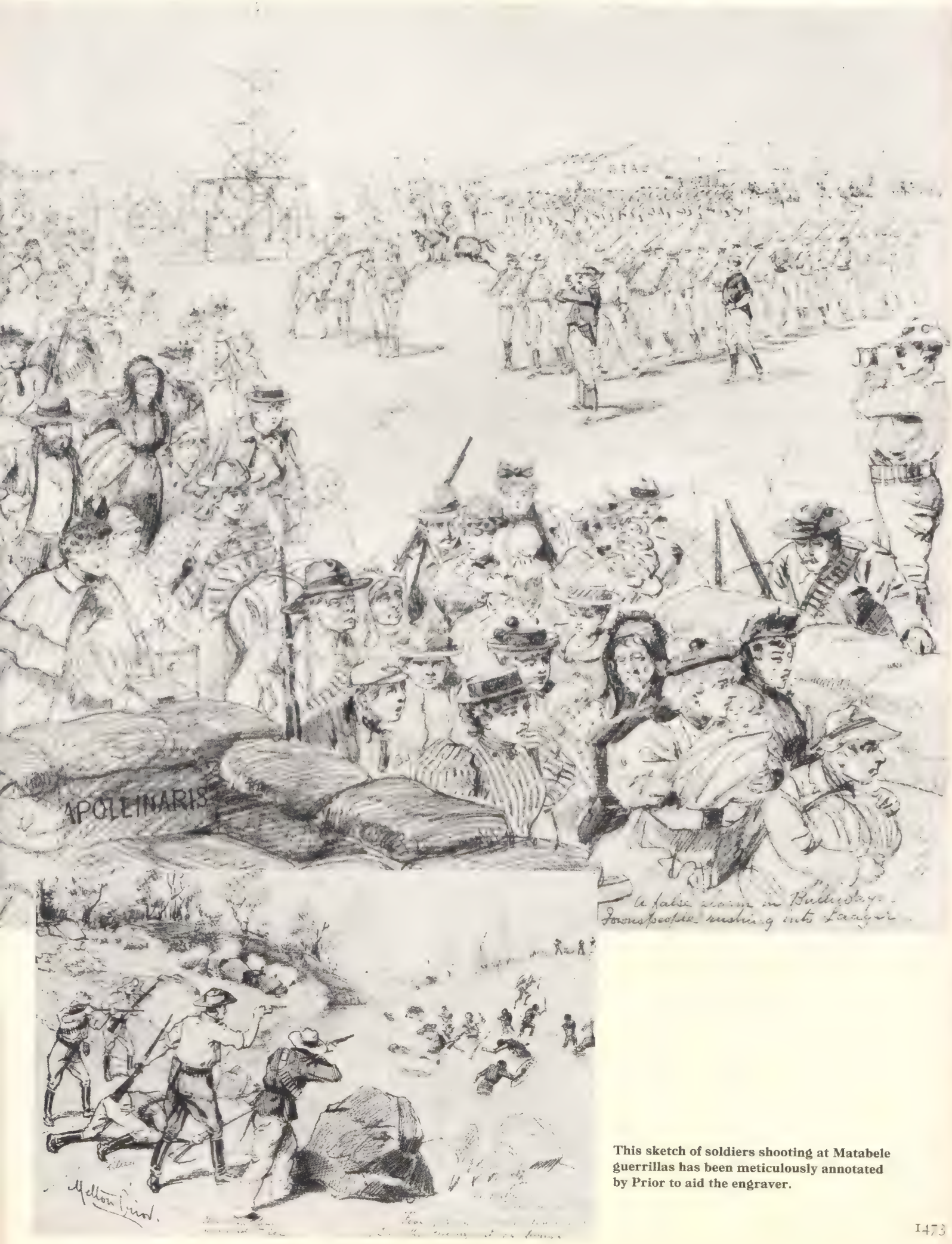
At first an engraver-artist used his imagination to depict events, basing his visually mythical creations on news-clippings. The 1850s saw the rise of the first "Special Artists," men who braved wars and epidemics to provide on-the-spot sketches from which engravers could make blocks that captured the original event with somewhat greater authenticity.

Melton Prior of the *Illustrated London News*, whose sketches of the Matabele uprising of 1896 are shown here, was among the best of the "specials". His shrill voice which together with his bald pate earned him the nickname of the "screeching billiard ball" from his colleagues, made him familiar to officers, explorers and settlers throughout the Empire. Each week, from the time he covered his first war in 1873 until he finally returned home in 1904, his drawings, suitably modified for home consumption, thrilled a public hungry for true-life adventure.

Look-outs in Bulawayo's "Crow's Nest" – as the watch-tower was named – watch anxiously as a column of scouts ride out to reinforce a picket that has been attacked by the Matabele.

In a drawing crammed with detail, the townspeople of Bulawayo scurry into the makeshift fortifications as the alarm is raised – falsely as it turned out – and the soldiers line up ready for action.

As this sketch of the married ladies' quarters at Bulawayo shows, children are scolded as usual and polite conversation continues even in the middle of an uprising.



This sketch of soldiers shooting at Matabele guerrillas has been meticulously annotated by Prior to aid the engraver.

Journalist with a Pencil

In his 30 years of work, Melton Prior's travels allowed him just one year at home. Among other assignments he observed three revolutions in South America, was besieged by the Boers at Ladysmith, and covered the campaign of 1897 on the North-West Frontier of India. Some of his sketches of this latter campaign are shown on these pages.

The "special" differed from earlier artist-travellers in that he had to know what to draw, and then to draw under any circumstances. In short, he had to be a pictorial journalist with the talents of a good foreign correspondent. Prior had these talents in abundance: wherever he was, he could be seen on his horse or crouching behind a barricade, sketching and scribbling notes at an amazing speed. ("Specials" could record a scene quicker than photographers of the day, who had to rely on slow, bulky equipment until quick-action, dry-film photography came into wide use in the late 1890s.)

Prior, like other "specials," would work up his notes into full drawings in the evening, and these would be sent to London as quickly as possible. There the drawings and notes would be given to the engravers, several of whom would work concurrently on one illustration. Consequently, by the time the pictures appeared in the magazine, little remained of the individuality displayed in these lively sketches.

Prior (right) and another topee'd journalist are forced by a sudden attack to join in the defence of an outpost.

Loyal Gurkhas bring captured Afridi spies into th

An officer is shot in the arm by a stray bullet while he sits at lunch.

British camp. In the background smoke rises from the hundreds of burning homesteads set on fire by the British as a punitive measure.

The commanding officer of the British troops reads out the terms of surrender to defeated rebellious chieftains.

III. A Perilous Profession

At a further remove from actuality even than the revamped drawings that appeared in the *Illustrated London News* stand the vast, colourful canvases produced by artists at home, of whom the two best known were R. Caton-Woodville and Lady Elizabeth Butler.

Caton-Woodville, an ex-captain of the Royal North Devon Hussars, had at least seen the aftermath of war. While in Cairo helping to design uniforms for the Egyptian Army, he was commissioned by Queen Victoria to paint "The Guards at Tel-el-Kebir" not long after the famous battle of 1882; he prepared for this by taking photographs and making sketches on the actual battlefield.

Other battle paintings done by Caton-Woodville, such as "The Charge of the Light Brigade," "Saving the Guns at Maiwand," "The Charge of the 21st Lancers at Omdurman," and "Too Late!", depicting General Stewart's death just before Khartoum was reached, captured the imagination of a wide public. He stamped his histrionic vision of imperial warfare upon the popular consciousness more successfully even than some of his war artist colleagues who had actually been present at battles he painted.

Lady Elizabeth Butler was said to have done for the soldier in Art what Kipling had done for him in Literature. She had been educated abroad, was the wife of an Anglo-Irish general who had himself fought in several of the Empire's "little wars" and found fame and fortune in 1874 with her classic oil-painting "The Roll Call." This Crimean tableau was hung at the Royal Academy to unanimous acclaim from public and critics alike. It became the hit of the season and typecast her as a painter of military scenes. She remained popular, especially with the army, as a result of her fidelity to detail, skilful draughtsmanship and sense of movement and vitality.

In Lady Butler's work, the cult of the heroic is carried to an extreme. She is probably best remembered for her archetypal Victorian painting "The Survivor," which portrays the arrival of the solitary Dr. Brydon at Jellalabad, sole survivor of a massacre during the First Afghan War in 1842. (It is reproduced in Issue 19 of this history, *North-West Frontier*). There is also her well-known painting "Floreat Etona!" which, although created from the imagination, depicts an incident that supposedly took place at Laing's Nek during the South African War of 1880. According to the anecdote, a young adjutant from Eton has his horse shot from under him and another Etonian encourages him on, shouting: "Come along, Monck, 'Floreat Etona', we must be in the first rank," but is shot dead as he speaks. A more heroic view of warfare would be difficult to imagine.

Two Australian journalists on patrol with British troops during the Boer War are struck down by enemy bullets in an incident underlining the perils run by special correspondents.

Towards the end of the century, one area in particular, Egypt and the Sudan, drew scores of correspondents and artists. Events there between 1880 and 1898 provided a stream of incidents for the chroniclers of patriotic adventure: the Nationalist revolt that threatened British domination of the Suez Canal; the defeat of the Nationalist leader, Arabi, at Tel-el-Kebir in 1882; the new threat of the Mahdi's religious hordes to the British presence in Egypt; the defeat of General William Hicks in 1883 at El Obeid; Gordon's dispatch to withdraw the Egyptian garrison from the Sudan; his encirclement in Khartoum and death at Mahdist hands; the advance of General Wolseley's relief expedition; a list of romantic-sounding battles – El Teb, Abu Klea, Tamai, Gubat; Wolseley's two-days-too-late arrival at Khartoum; and finally, a decade later, Kitchener's vengeful march up the Nile to destroy Mahdism.

At any time in these years, reporting on the campaigns was a tough assignment. When G.A. Henty took the chair at a Savage Club house dinner held to entertain war correspondents returning after the war, he hailed them as men who "have come back to us out of the jaws of death." Twenty newspapermen had been sent out to North Africa to follow the British Army's progress in the Sudan and along the Nile; of these, seven did not return. (There is a memorial tablet to them in St. Paul's Cathedral.) The loss of life among war correspondents had been out of all proportion to that among the troops. "Why, gentlemen," exclaimed Henty, "from the days of the Crimea, when William Russell, Nat (Nicholas)

Woods, and, in a humble way, myself, began the work of correspondents with the British Army, all the wars, all the campaigns together, have not caused such a mortality as this."

The particularly high death-rate, although low when compared to fatalities in the two world wars, can be largely explained by the constant danger to the non-combatant from stray bullets in the "zarebas" or barricaded enclosures employed by British troops; the risks from hand-to-hand fighting; and the fanaticism of the Dervishes and their grisly policy of not taking prisoners.

Newspaper proprietors back home thought these risks were worth while in terms of attracting readers. The 1884–85 campaigns in Africa aroused so much interest and excitement among the British reading public because the picturesque, exotic locale lent itself to vivid word painting while, at the same time, offering opportunities to reverse earlier British defeats at the hands of the Mahdi.

The most appealing story of all to the late Victorians was the tale of General Gordon, stubbornly ensconced in Khartoum, defying the might of the Mahdi's hordes. As Kipling rather caustically commented on the public taste for vicarious participation in these wars: "It was above all things necessary that England at breakfast should be amused and thrilled and interested, whether Gordon lived or died, or half the British Army went to pieces in the sands."

And the miraculous escapes and occasional deaths of the "specials" made marvellous copy. When General Hicks and his rabble of Egyptian gendarmerie were wiped out near El Obeid in November, 1883, both Frank Vizetelly and Edmund O'Donovan, two war correspondents, died alongside him. These two well-known Savage Club members were reputedly the first war correspondents to lose their lives while engaged in the service of their newspapers. Alexander Cameron, the dour Scotsman who first reported the British defeat at Majuba Hill in 1881, was killed at the Battle of Abu Klea in January, 1885, a few days before the fall of Khartoum. John Cameron of the *Standard* was shot as he rose to take a tin of sardines from his native servant, and St. Leger Herbert of the *Morning*

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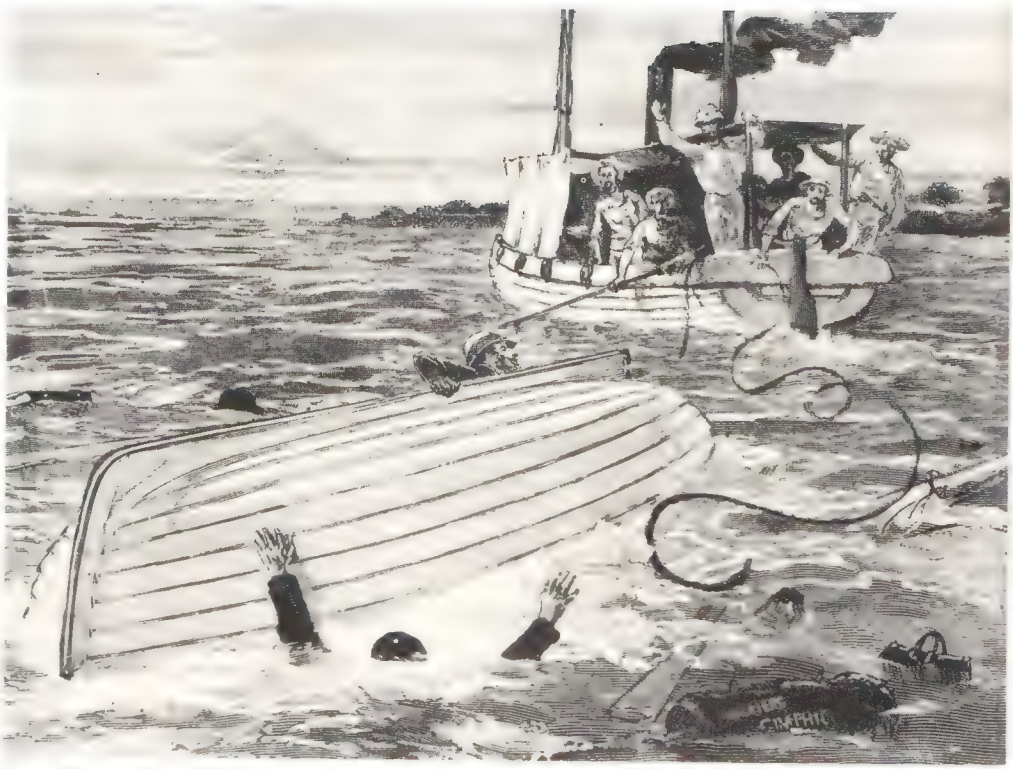


Artist Frederick Villiers and journalist Charles Williams reach for the rope flung towards their boat, which overturned while following the 1884 Nile Expedition to rescue General Gordon.

Villiers's sketch in the *Graphic* shows the burial of one of his comrades, John Cameron of the *Standard*, shot during the Sudan War as he rose to take a tin of sardines from his servant.

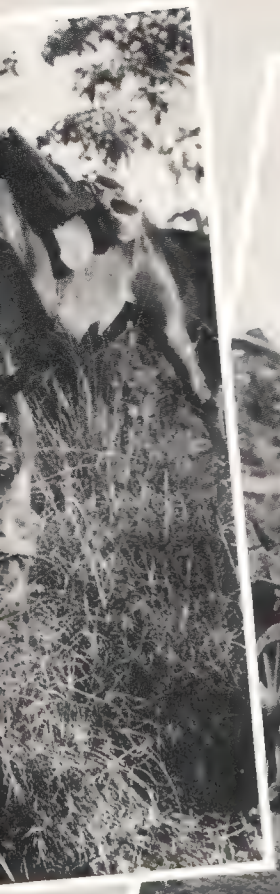
THE CAMERA'S EYE

Towards 1900, fast film and good lenses permitted the first action photographs, like the ones on these pages taken during the Boer War by Horace Nicholls, one of the many photographers – including cine-cameramen – who covered the bitter, three-year conflict.

Until then, the photographers were limited by wagonloads of equipment, long exposure times and lack of public interest. Along with their cameras, tripods and lenses, photographers had to transport darkrooms complete with bottles of chemicals and all the apparatus needed to prepare and develop their glass "wet-plates." In addition, with exposure time of 10–15 seconds, early photographs were of static subjects and were usually sold only as prints: though a process to reproduce photographs in newspapers was invented in 1880, photographs could not as yet rival the drawings of the "Special Artists" for drama. Despite the technical revolution of the 1890s, when new films reduced exposure time to 1/50th of a second, it took until the First World War before the immediacy and accuracy of this unfamiliar style of illustration became a permanent part of magazine and newspaper production.

"Tired Out" was Horace Nicholls's title for this photograph of an exhausted scout taking a quick rest while his company's tethered and laden horses graze peacefully near by.

Exhausted British troops near the end of the 60-mile march to relieve besieged Ladysmith.



The wounded are carried away in a horse-drawn ambulance after a fierce battle.

In "After a Hard Day," Nicholls captured the weariness of the British troops as they left the town of Ladysmith.

Post, rather conspicuously wearing a red tunic, was also killed by a stray bullet shortly before the Battle of Gubat.

The adventures and narrow escapes were two a penny. Bennet Burleigh, a Scotsman who reported for the *Daily Telegraph* in the Sudan, described by a colleague as "bluff and kindly, with a heart far too big for his body," claimed to have been an eye-witness to the course of all the campaigns from Alexandria to Omdurman. "From the beginning to the death of Mahdism," he said, "I have followed the British and Egyptian troops into action against the Dervishes."

Many, indeed, thought that Bennet Burleigh could have received the V.C. for his exploits in the Sudan, for he was given much of the credit for the regrouping of the broken square at the Battle of Tamai in the eastern Sudan, by shouting "Men of the 65th, close up!"

At the Battle of Gubat Burleigh narrowly escaped death when he was hit on the throat by a ricocheting bullet – the firing was so heavy that all the war correspondents save one were hit by ricochets. He yelled out to Melton Prior, the war artist, "Pick it out, Prior! Pick it out!" at the same time clawing at his neck. Prior later recalled: "I said, 'There is nothing to pick out.' 'Pick it out, you idiot!' Surely enough a ricochet bullet had struck him in the muscle under the ear, and soon raised a great black lump half the size of a chicken's egg, but the shock and pain were so great that he would not believe that there was nothing to pick out."

Prior himself must have doubted whether he would survive Gubat. He certainly believed that another annihilation, like that which had overtaken General Hicks, was about to take place and just before the battle started said to a colleague, John Cameron, "By jove, old chap, we are in for another fight, and I don't like the idea of it at all." Cameron, who was killed in the ensuing mêlée, replied in exasperation, with a possible premonition of his own death, "If you don't like it, if you are funking, why did you come? You had better go back!" This suggestion proved impossible to follow

With Steevens in Sudan

One of the most outstanding war correspondents was the *Daily Mail*'s young, brilliant George W. Steevens. In 1898, at the age of only 28, he produced his superb book *With Kitchener to Khartoum*, based on the despatches he sent during the campaign against the Mahdi. By turns evocative, sympathetic and critical, this work, which ran through 22 editions before Steevens' death in 1900, broke away from the patriotic bombast that had typified so much 19th-Century war reporting.

Much of its importance lies in Steevens' refusal to see the battle of Omdurman, in which 11,000 Dervishes perished at a cost of 50 British dead, as a tribute either to British gallantry or Kitchener's leadership.

"The battle was almost a miracle of success," wrote Steevens. "For that, thanks are due to the Khalifa, whose generalship throughout was a masterpiece of imbecility." Had it not been for that, Steevens pointed out, the outcome could have been very different, for the British made "distinct mistakes," – the popularly acclaimed charge of the 21st Lancers being "the most flagrant."

The charge was, in Steevens's words, an "indisputable folly. . . . For cavalry to charge unbroken infantry, of unknown strength, over unknown ground . . . was as grave a tactical crime as cavalry could possible commit."

A simple cross marks the grave of G.W.Steevens who died at the age of 30 of enteric fever during the siege of Ladysmith, bringing a remarkable journalistic career to an end.

as the British zareba was soon surrounded: Prior's only reaction was: "Such is life, and of course if I am stupid enough to follow Tommy Atkins I must share his luck. It is not all beer and skittles."

Another artist who narrowly escaped death in the Sudan was Frederick Villiers of the *Graphic*, who had spent more than 40 years reporting campaigns. He claimed to have been in more wars than any man alive and was known as the "Forbes of the special war artists."

Villiers, like Burleigh, was also in the broken British square at Tamai and confessed later, "how I got out of that fight I hardly know to this day." He remembers hearing the voice of Burleigh shouting: "Give it to the beggars! Let 'em have it boys! Hurrah! Three cheers – hurrah!"

Melton Prior, too, had a close shave at Tamai when "an Arab loomed up close to me, and I saw him, spear in hand, just in the act of throwing it. Suddenly down it whizzed over my shoulder into the back of one of the 42nd, who fell to the ground with a groan, dead."

At the Battle of El Teb, Villiers had another narrow escape while engaged in sketching a supposedly dying boy-warrior lying on a pile of dead. Suddenly the Arab sprang into the air and rushed for him with a knife. Villiers ran for it, trying to draw his revolver as he raced over the sand, with the boy so close at his heels that he felt his hot breath and heard the swish of the descending knife as his pursuer struck and missed – "I thought to feel his knife in my back every minute." Eventually Villiers managed to draw his revolver, and shouted to some near-by soldiers, "Have you plugs in your rifles? Let's make a stand." They turned, one soldier fired, and the boy went down, shot through the body, still clenching his knife. "He was a remarkably handsome boy," Villiers said later.

The reconquering of the Sudan in the late 1890s by Major-General Sir Horatio Herbert Kitchener, who had been a major with the Gordon Relief Expedition, may not have provided the same glamorous or tragic spectacle as the campaigns of the mid-1880s but it did produce two of the finest books written on any colonial campaign: Winston Churchill's *The River War* and *With Kitchener to Khartoum* by George W. Steevens, the *Daily Mail*'s youthful correspondent.

The host of war correspondents who rushed out to the Sudan to be in at the death of Mahdism found comparatively little to enliven their narratives because of the determined, machine-like precision with which the war was organized by Kitchener. Perhaps as a result, correspondents expressed their discontent with the military authorities more freely than usual during this campaign. They complained about lack of attention from the censor, favouritism, insufficient information and irking restrictions on their freedom of movement.

In the light of their critical attitude, it is understandable why Kitchener had no love for the war correspondents. Like General Wolseley, he thought of them as "a race of drones" or as "those newly invented curses to armies." Until overridden by the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, he refused to allow correspondents to advance with the vanguard, and directly after the fall of Omdurman they were sent back to Egypt. Shortly before the battle itself, reporters were kept waiting for a long time outside Kitchener's tent, hoping to obtain a statement from him. At long last he emerged and strode through them muttering, "Get out of my way, you drunken swabs!"

There is something ultimately rather chilling about the stern Kitchener's methodical extermination of Dervish resistance to the British invasion of the Sudan. The emphasis throughout was on cool deliberation and careful planning – it took his army two years to ascend the Nile, whereas Wolseley's expedition had only taken several months. By September, 1898, Kitchener was before Omdurman, after years of preparation, with a force of over 20,000 facing 50,000 warriors armed with nothing better than spears and obsolete guns. British artillery-fire from gunboats moored on the Nile and the army's Lee-Metford rifles and deadly Maxim machine-guns relentlessly mowed down the oncoming Dervishes. "No white troops," G.W.Steevens wrote, "would have faced that torrent of death for five minutes. . . . The torrent swept into them and hurled them down in whole companies. . . . It was the last day of Mahdism and the greatest. They could never get

During the Boer War, Winston Churchill, still in his 20s, served both as war correspondent for the *Morning Post* and as soldier in the South African Light Horse.

near and they refused to hold back. . . . It was not a battle, but an execution."

The dead and wounded piled up in mounds in the desert. As Bennet Burleigh described the battle, in suitably inflated style: "In the face of a fire that mowed down battalions and smashed great gaps in their columns they flinched not nor turned. . . . In sheer blundering brutishness, the ferocious dervishes tried to stem the storm. . . . Death was reaping a gigantic harvest. Hecatombs of slain were being spread everywhere in front. . . . With a trifling loss of a few hundred men he [Kitchener] had discomfited and slain 10,000 of the great dervish army."

At half past eleven, according to Churchill, Kitchener shut up his field-glasses, with the remark that he thought the enemy had been given "a good dusting." Only now, in Henty's words, was the "stain upon British honour caused by the desertion of Gordon" by Gladstone's Liberal government "finally wiped out."

Winston Churchill was personally involved in one of the few "romantic" episodes in this day of ruthless slaughter, being on the left flank when his 21st Lancers made their gallant, calamitous

continued on p. 1484

A LIGHTER TOUCH

The artist Leonard Raven-Hill was a staunch imperialist and close friend of Rudyard Kipling, many of whose books he illustrated. Like Kipling he had the common touch – a feel for the personal and the lighthearted, as shown in the notes on these sketches, drawn on his journey to Delhi for the 1903 Durbar.

Raven-Hill began as a painter, but soon he turned to pen-and-ink sketching for magazines. The work rewarded him well. As well as travelling widely in search of material, he set up two humorous magazines and became *Punch*'s chief political cartoonist.

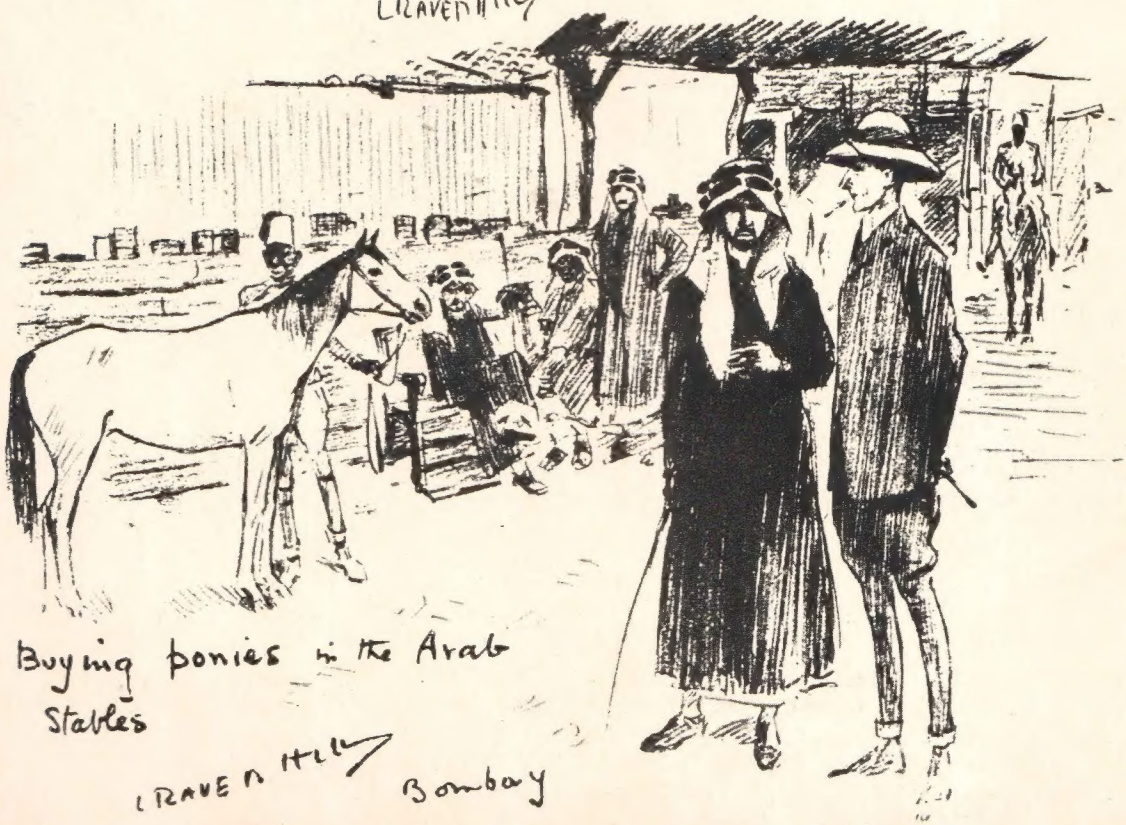
a wayside Railway Station

The Official photographer of the Dunbar, endeavouring to get a snapshot of the Finish of the International Polo Cup Jodhpore v Alwar

He was clad in canary yellow

"Mail day" is the great day of the week

CRAVEN Hill



Buying ponies in the Arab Stables

CRAVEN Hill Bombay

charge. There is an exciting description of this charge in *The River War*, when "two living walls" suddenly "crashed together" as the Mahdi's followers sprang out of the very ground in front of the cavalry from a concealed wadi, meeting their enemies in a "prodigious" collision. As Churchill comments: "this was a private quarrel. The other might have been a massacre; but here the fight was fair, for we too fought with sword and spear." In a couple of minutes, 5 officers, 65 men and 119 horses out of fewer than 400 British had been killed or wounded. The war correspondents had found something they could get their journalistic teeth into at last. Heroism and adventure had returned.

G.W. Steevens's description of the Battle of Omdurman remains a classic, for his journalism more often approaches the level of literature than does that of any other war correspondent. He gave up a promising career as a scholar, "the Balliol prodigy" as he was known, to become a "priest of the imperialist idea." He worked for the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Daily Mail*, and in service to the latter he died of enteric fever at the siege of Ladysmith during the Boer War.

Steevens initiated not only a new conception of the war correspondent but a different style of journalism that some have compared with Ernest Hemingway's early reporting. Even Kitchener confessed to lifting paragraphs from Steevens's dispatches to use in his own because of the war correspondent's real insight into military affairs. After reading *With Kitchener to Khartoum*, H.L. Mencken, the famous American journalist, believed Steevens to be "the greatest newspaper reporter who ever lived."

Steevens's death, when he was only 30, not only deprived the *Daily Mail* of one of its biggest circulation-building names: it deprived British journalism of a talented writer, one who had broken away from the cumbersome, self-centred style of 19th-Century war reporting. This tradition still endured, but only briefly. The influence of the 19th Century professional war reporters died rapidly as administrative consolidation in the Empire replaced military expansion and the more complex demands of European politics allowed increasingly less scope for their services ❧

A *Times* "special" stylishly surveys a battle in 1912, before the Great War ended the heroic reporting of the age of imperial "little wars."

High-Victorian evening and dinner dress, 1879